

Chapter 57

Zeke didn't stop running until he was in the house. He was breathless and lost his footing many times but kept his hold on Ava. Derek and Myles had shifted to keep up with him because he was a lot faster than them, even in his human form, but he had no idea how he had managed that with the silver still burning through him. He knew some of it was Ava's pain through this cursed bond, adding to pain that had already been crippling before he had forced the shift and gone into the forest.

Ava looked lifeless in his arms. His heart constricted in his chest when he looked at her pale face and the cuts and bruises all over it, but he concentrated on her heartbeat to calm himself down. She was alive. In pain but alive.

Drake and Myles shifted back, and Myles made to take Ava from him, but he growled in warning. Shadow wanted her close. And so did he, Fuck.

She could have died. Another minute and even he would never have been able to find her in there. The forest had claimed countless lives since the Academy was built, and it grew stronger with each passing year. Ava shouldn't have survived this, not when she was so human and frail. She shouldn't have been able to get so far into the forest. He'd had

to struggle and fight his way to get to her, and if it weren't for Shadow, they would both have died in there.

He staggered to the stairs, still listening to her heartbeat, unable to concentrate on anything else.

“Let us help you, Derek said gently. “She needs to go to the infirmary”

“You both do,” Myles said.

“No!”

The first thing those doctors would do was hand them over to the Council for breaching the boundary into the forest. It was the worst infraction anyone could commit at the academy, and the punishment would be severe.

“You'll be okay. You're an Alpha, they won't-“

“I said no.”

He staggered up the stairs. All the unnatural strength Shadow had used to save Ava had taken everything out of him. His limbs had already been numb but now he felt like he was dragging a ton of metal behind him. The hallway to his room seemed longer than usual as he struggled to the end of it. His body was already shutting down, but only Shadow's stubbornness kept them going. Shadow would take care of his mate, no matter what.

He breathed a sigh of relief once he was in his room and then dragged his feet to his bed.

He gently placed Ava down on it and then staggered back when he looked at her body and saw the full damage. She was cut everywhere on her body, Bruises, cuts and blisters like first-degree burns covered too much of her skin, and when he reached over and gently lifted her T-shirt, he saw the same under it. And there was blood everywhere, still seeping out of her wounds and out of a nasty gash on her side.

The forest made no exceptions. It had been ready to take her. Even though he had dragged her out of there, there was no guarantee that she would ever be the same. No one had ever lived to tell the tale of what was in there, but the very few that had done it before the forest had become this strong had become so messed up that the Council had to put them down. That way why they would take them both in straight away, to make sure the forest had not infected them.

‘She’ll heal She always heals,’ Shadow said.

But would she? He saw no sign of it now when she’d seemed to heal instantly after Claire’s bite on Friday night, Maybe she did need medical attention.

‘That’s a death sentence. You know that,’ Shadow growled.

“Zeke... Sit down. I’ll get you a wet cloth,” Derek said.

He hadn’t noticed that his packmates had followed him into his room. Myles’ jaw had dropped open, his eyes glued to his body. He knew he

was a mess. He had already been bleeding from the silver chains before the forest got him just as good as it got Ava. His wounds matched Ava's

With what seemed like the last of his strength, he pulled a chair over to the bed and dropped himself into it. When Derek returned with a bowl of warm water and a washcloth, he stopped his Beta from using them on him. He took the cloth and reached over with his shaky hand to gently wipe Ava's face. The cuts kept bleeding. She wasn't healing.

'She will heal,' Shadow repeated.

Maybe this was pointless. The guards had been close, perhaps they had already seen him running into the forest and back out. They would have reported him immediately. If that was the case, the dean was already on his way to deal with him.

He wiped Ava's face again, and once again, the cuts carried on bleeding

"She's not waking up." Myles whispered.

"Zeke... You have to consider what will happen if she doesn't wake up and they find out we didn't take her to the infirmary," Derek said

The thought of her dying broke something in him. His body had been taken over by emotions he didn't want to feel since the moment he saw her. but this... He didn't want to feel this. He could feel his heart being hacked into several pieces as he sank into a darkness he had never felt before, even when his mother had been taken from him. It felt like he was dying, too,

“I need to take her...” he whispered.

“No! They will kill her,” Shadow growled. ‘And they will kill you. Think. Ezekiel!’

It was ironic that it was his wolf thinking rationally. He wiped her face again and then held his breath as he watched the cuts. The bleeding had stopped.

He released his breath as all the tension left his body. She was healing, just not as fast as before. The forest had taken too much from them. They both just needed to rest.

He threw the washcloth back into the bowl and then climbed onto the bed beside her, disregarding all the blood and the open wounds. She wouldn’t like it when she woke, but he needed to hold her. He did not have the energy or the will to light this bond, not now.

When Ava was settled in his arms, he buried his head in her neck and took a deep breath. Her scent washed over him, soothing him from the inside.

‘Mine,’ Shadow said.

“Mine,” he whispered,